



File Code: 1920
Date: August 18, 2016

Dear Interested Party,

During the summer of 2015, over 184,000 acres burned across the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. Impacts as a result of these fires affected numerous resources. The Forests have been responding to these impacts since last summer in a variety of manners, including Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) work, planting trees in burned areas, proposing timber salvage where appropriate and other projects. One of the most critical projects proposed addresses the hazards that users and employees of the National Forests face as they use their public lands. The Road, Administrative and Recreation Site Maintenance (RARSM) project will maintain critical Forest infrastructure and mitigate hazards trees that pose a risk to the public health, safety and lives of Forest users.

Following months of analysis and conversations with interested parties, I have made a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) and a decision on the RARSM project, as documented in a Decision Notice (DN). My decision responds to the public comments we have received throughout the process and maintains our critical Forest infrastructure including roads, administrative sites and recreation sites on 5 Rangers Districts across the Forests. Project design features and Best Management Practices will ensure no significant impacts occur as a result of this project, and removal of a portion of the hazard trees felled will assist in funding the completion of the entire project.

Of the 238 miles of roads and 47 recreation and administrative sites impacted by the wildfires of the summer of 2015, 133 miles of roads and 9 recreation and administrative sites are in need of maintenance and/or hazard tree mitigation. My decision will maintain all 133 miles and 9 sites. On 46 miles of road, removal of the felled hazard trees may occur through a commercial timber sale. On the remaining 87 miles, the hazard trees would be dropped and left in place. Fuel abatement activities would occur to ensure fuel concentrations remain below hazardous levels (7 to 33 tons per acre remaining on-site).

This project is located in the state of Idaho within Idaho County, on the Salmon River, Red River, Powell, North Fork, and Lochsa/Powell Ranger Districts of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. The road segments that comprise this project are all within the fire perimeters of the 2015 wildfires, including the Tepee Springs, Wash, Woodrat, Baldy, May, Boulder, Deadwood Mountain, Eldorado 2, Fire Creek, Fourbit Creek, Frenchman Butte, Higgins Hump, Jay Point, Lost Hat, Musselshell Creek, Noble, Pete Forks, Slide, Snow, Snow Creek, Snowy Summit, and Walde – Mystery fires. Hazard tree mitigation activities by fire and activity type as listed below:



Fire	Drop and Leave	Removal	Removal- 1 tree length no equipment off road	Grand Total
May		0.39		0.39
Baldy	0.41	0.87		1.28
Boulder	5.66	0.19		5.85
Deadwood Mountain	0.64			0.64
Eldorado 2	0.52	0.01		0.53
Fire Creek	0.64			0.64
Fourbit Creek	0.15	3.06		3.21
Frenchman Butte	0.56	0.56		1.12
Higgins Hump	2.02			2.02
Jay Point	0.84		1.71	2.55
Lost Hat		0.41		0.41
Musselshell Creek	1.23	4.8		6.03
Noble	2.97			2.97
Pete Forks	4.44	4.36		8.8
Slide	2.14			2.14
Snow	0.09	0.88		0.97
Snow Creek	0.76	1.27		2.03
Snowy Summit	4.74	8.6		13.34
Tepee Springs	36.94		3.83	40.77
Walde - Mystery	2.51			2.51
Wash	14.8	0.74	7.93	23.47
Woodrat	5.13	6.86		11.99
Grand Total	87.19	32.44	13.47	133.1

This action is necessary to fulfill my responsibility of taking actions that contribute to the safety of Forest employees, visitors, and users, to the extent practicable. Additionally, the decision maintains forest infrastructure, including system roads, recreation sites and administrative sites that were damaged by the wildfires of 2015. Maintenance of this infrastructure is critical to the continued safe use by the public and employees and helps to prevent future negative impacts that could occur when maintenance is not performed in a timely manner. These system roads have been evaluated in travel management plan decisions and the forest travel analysis process. Those efforts indicate that these roads are needed for the management of the Forest. The recreation and administrative sites are also sites that the Forest will continue to operate.

I have made many modifications to the initial proposed action in order to be responsive to comments and concerns from some members of the public. Some changes were also made to

address potential resource concerns and insure compliance with the Forest Plan and other laws and regulations. These modifications are site-specific and reflect personal knowledge of the conditions on the ground and the environmental analysis. I have reviewed the decision with the local District Rangers. In making my decision I have also reviewed the Environmental Assessment and its Appendices as well as the project record upon which the analysis is based. I have spoken personally with members of the public, local and state government officials, Nez Perce Tribe Executive Committee members and staff, and many others. The majority of the comments from stakeholders have been in support of the project and the emergency situation determination. Two organizations had concerns, mainly with the extent of the project activities off the road prism, the commercial aspect of the removal, and activities on administratively closed roads or within Inventoried Roadless Areas. They also had concerns that the emergency situation determination would not allow for meaningful public input. I have modified the project to address many of these concerns while taking care of the most immediate hazards and maintenance needs. Those modifications also demonstrate that throughout this process, the public has had meaningful input which affected the decision directly.

On May 13, 2016 the Chief of the Forest Service granted an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) for the Road, Administrative and Recreation Site Maintenance Project per 36 CFR 218.21.

An ESD allows for immediate post-decision implementation enabling the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests to take action before substantial timber deterioration takes place, putting them in a better position to remove roadside hazards, restore the burned area and reduce the risk of no-bid timber sales (ESD page 3).

Swift action is necessary to avoid impacts on human health and safety, natural resource protection, and loss of commodity value. A delay would jeopardize the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests' ability to accomplish critical restoration objectives (ESD page 4).

The ESD formally forgoes the 36 CFR 218 objection process to be responsive to the urgency required to implement the proposed action without compromising human life and safety. As such, there is no administrative review of objection process for this project.

While an Emergency Situation Determination has been requested and granted, forgoing the objection period, this project has been responsive to public comment from the onset. The decision made here is directly in response to comments from several interested parties. While there is no formal objection period, review and edits were made and suggested from Regional Office staff and leadership as a result of public comment on the project. The Regional Office has reviewed and suggested modifications to the proposed action based on Regional Office specialist review of the EA, proposed action and public comments. The majority of the differences between the proposed action and this decision were in direct response to public comment, as was the initial decision to transition from a Categorical Exclusion to an Environmental Assessment. This added informal review and response period in direct response to public comment makes timely implementation even more critical.

Implementation may begin immediately following notification to interested and affected parties

pursuant to 36 CFR 218.21(d)(1) and 36 CFR 220.7(d). The ESD granted by the Chief of the Forest Service forgoes the pre-decisional objection process and allows for immediate implementation.

The Decision Notice and FONSI, Environmental Assessment and Emergency Situation Determination are available online at: <http://prdp2fs.ess.usda.gov/project/?project=48213>.

For further information concerning the Road, Administrative and Recreation Site Maintenance Project, contact Zach Peterson, Forest Planner, at (208) 935-4239 or zacharyapeterson@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cheryl F. Probert", with a stylized flourish at the end.

CHERYL F. PROBERT
Forest Supervisor